

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, February 7, 2017**

**Committee Room**

**Department of Community Services**

**Re: Work and Education Rules for Income Assistance Clients**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Ms. Patricia Arab (Chairman)  
Mr. Brendan Maguire (Vice-Chairman)  
Ms. Pam Eyking  
Mr. Bill Horne  
Ms. Joyce Treen  
Mr. Eddie Orrell  
Mr. Larry Harrison  
Ms. Marian Mancini  
Ms. Lisa Roberts

[Ms. Pam Eyking was replaced by Mr. Iain Rankin]

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

### **Department of Community Services**

Mr. Brandon Grant, Executive Director (ESIA)  
Ms. Joy Knight, Employment Support Services



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2017**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Ms. Patricia Arab

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services. My name is Patricia Arab, the MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park, and I am the Chair of this committee.

Today we are going to be receiving a presentation from the Department of Community Services in regard to work and education rules for income assistance clients.

I would like to start off by asking our committee members to introduce themselves. We'll start with Mr. Orrell.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have Darlene Henry who is our committee clerk and Mr. Gordon Hebb who is our legal counsel. It's also Mr. Orrell's birthday so we'll go on record to issue him a Happy Birthday.

I'd like to welcome you all here. We have a large crowd watching our committee today, which is wonderful, it's great to see. I'd like to remind those who are in attendance to keep their phones on silent, on vibrate, so we can keep all the noise down. With that, I will ask our presenters to introduce themselves.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

We're happy to have you here. Mr. Grant, you can get started.

MR. BRANDON GRANT: Good afternoon and thank you again for the opportunity to address the standing committee, this time to talk about education and educational supports through the ESIA program. We know that education and employment are key to breaking the cycle of poverty for many people. That's why we are exploring ways to strengthen the supports we provide people on income assistance and have improved some of our programs.

As many of you know, the Department of Community Services provides assistance to our most vulnerable citizens. The ESIA program offers financial support for basic needs, including food, clothing, and housing for people who can't meet those needs themselves. It can also include supports to help people engage in the workforce and access post-secondary education. Our goals include helping people achieve independence either through employment, training, and education, and help everyone we work with to be active and included in their community.

As we mentioned in our last appearance, our department has been undergoing a significant transformation and redesign of our programs to make sure they are as effective and as efficient as they can be. We want three things: a system that makes it easier for Nova Scotians to find the services they need, services that support clients' goals that they have for themselves and their family, and a system that achieves better results for Nova Scotians. To get this we needed to look at our programs and services from the perspective of people who use them and that's what we've been doing.

We've already made some changes within the ESIA. We've simplified some processes for clients by developing a client-friendly and easy-to-understand document that will help people understand available supports and services; we've improved access to caseworkers through our phone line system; and we've simplified the language used in our correspondence to clients, making it easier for them to read and understand information coming from the department. We're also working on streamlining the ESIA medical form.

We've also given ESS caseworkers the ability to make certain child care and transportation payments. This means that clients can go directly to their ESS caseworker for quick ad hoc payments.

Finally, our minister recently announced enhancements to two of our post-secondary programs. These include the expansion of the Educate to Work program to provide some financial and case management support to dependents of the ESIA program so they can attend community college. We've also expanded the Career Seek program to include special needs like tuition support for the first year of study, a child care and transportation supplement, an incidental allowance to support campus integration, and support for Internet access to assist with their studies.

Single parents can't go to classes if they don't have child care and they can't participate in things like group projects if it means having an unbudgeted meal on campus. These changes to these programs also reflect our department's commitment to finding innovative solutions to work preventively to address intergenerational dependence on the ESIA. It is our hope that by expanding educational supports to dependents of ESIA that clients will help break down the barriers to education and disrupt the cycle of poverty.

We know there is more work to be done and that the people we serve need to be at the heart of the process. Our ESIA transformation is happening with the help, advice and feedback of clients and stakeholders. So far we've engaged with over 180 clients in meaningful discussions and multiple First Voice group sessions and received valuable feedback from those clients.

We've recently held a second round of ESIA stakeholder engagement sessions across the province to inform participants of the progress we've made to date through ESIA transformation and to gain further feedback on topics including special needs. Sessions were held in October and November of last year with over 130 people representing organizations and advocacy groups from across the province. We will create a program that is administratively simple, transparent, sustainable, streamlined and, more important, empowering. It will be fair and easily understood by clients and stakeholders.

Changing the ESIA program overall will take some time. Community Services will continue meeting with interested individual groups over the coming months. We do have a presentation to go through as well.

To provide some program overview we'll also talk about a few items we think the committee might be interested in, including our wage incentive program and talk about what supports are available through the ESIA for employment supports and educational supports as well. We'll talk about our post-secondary programming changes that we've made in what is currently in place.

The purpose of the ESIA program is it provides assistance to persons in need and supports them moving towards self-sufficiency. As I've said before, we help with food, clothing, shelter and special needs. We also have supports to help access to employment supports as well as supports to be actively engaging in the community. Our goals are for independence, inclusion in the community, and self-sufficiency.

This is our program budget, where our expenditures happen within ESIA. The biggest portion of our expenditures is around IA payments, the money that goes out the door to our clients. That makes up about 64 per cent of the expenditures for ESIA. We also have a DCS-specific Pharmacare program as well as a child benefit. ESS grants make up about \$5.4 million. We also have other discretionary grants as well. What you'll see there, too, is about 9 per cent of our budget is in relation to ESIA wages or the administration attached to our program.

We have a wage exemption policy. The wage exemption policy exempts wages that people earn through our program. The goal is to encourage those who are ready and able to enter the labour market to move permanently into the labour market. We have about 26,000 cases in the province. Approximately 2,800 clients report wages from income, representing about \$1.6 million in reported wages.

The way that the program works is, we have a wage exemption for those who are not in the supported employment category. Those folks can earn \$150 before it affects the amount of assistance they receive and 30 per cent of any remaining net wages per month. Those folks in the supportive employment category - those folks who may be attached to an adult service centre or require on-the-job supports - can earn up to \$300 with the remaining 30 per cent of net wages per month as well.

It has remained relatively stable. Over the years, there has been about 10 per cent to 12 per cent of our caseload reporting wages. It hasn't really changed much over the years. Through ESIA transformation, this is an area in which we certainly have an interest in exploring what we might be able to do to see if we can make a change to the wage exemption policy. During our ESIA stakeholder engagement, this topic came up in a lot of our different sessions across the province with people talking about whether or not increasing the wage exemption might have an impact on this. What we can see is that, throughout the years, there has been a pretty steady rate of those folks who are reporting wages.

Employment Support Services - just an overview, ESIA has two divisions. There's Income Assistance as well as Employment Support Services. The ESS division of the ESIA program provides services and supports to help clients find and maintain employment. Clients must have an approved employment action plan. Some of the supports that we provide - or work with community service providers to provide - are job search assistance, essential skills development, job development, transitional supports, as well as skill development training.

We also work with folks to develop employment action plans. They're developed between a caseworker and a client to determine what supports are needed to meet a client's employment goals. We also conduct education plans where appropriate, so we can determine what further education is required to meet the employment goals and an education plan to work in partnership with that.

Eligibility for educational programs - all clients and/or their spouses are required to have an approved education plan to participate in educational programming. You must be in receipt of assistance for at least six months prior to participate in the post-secondary programming. You must be available for work when not involved in the educational program. We also require that you look at your eligibility through the supports that are available through EI.

Clients may be eligible for academic upgrading, literacy upgrading, our Educate to Work program which supports our clients through our community college, our Career Seek program which supports people to attend university, skills development programming; as well as continuing education courses. Some of the financial supports associated with this as well include cost for tuition and books, transportation, child care, as well as some employability-related needs, including supplies and work-related clothing as well. If you need some assistance with tools or work boots, we can provide some supports through our special needs provisions.

Now post-secondary education, it's fair to say that enrolment and completion rates have been declining over the years. What you can see here is going back to 2011, the amount of people within our Career Seek, as well as our Educate to Work program. We've seen the decline and certainly over the last year we've undertaken an internal review to see what we can do to see that trend discontinue and see if we can make some positive steps towards, where appropriate, supporting clients in these interventions. We've seen a bit of turnaround in 2016-17.

The review identified some program gaps, some client barriers and some possible opportunities for enhancements to address some of those gaps and barriers. What the review findings found around completion rates is that those folks who attend the Educate to Work program - that's the community college - 33 per cent of those in a two-year program completed the program, 48 per cent of graduates exit ESIA within 12 months. In Career Seek, 46 per cent of participants complete their degrees, as well as 58 per cent of graduates exit the program within 12 months.

Some external impacts - when I spoke to the committee last time - we know there has been a significant decline in our caseload over the years. As I've mentioned in our last appearance, our demographics within the caseloads have also changed. We're seeing more and more clients with more complex needs that wouldn't necessarily mean that a post-secondary education intervention might be appropriate at that time. Given the way that our program was previously structured before enhancements, it was far more attractive to attend college and take the ETW route versus the Career Seek route. Many of our folks have accessed student assistance to remain independent of ESIA as well.

We've undertaken the review. What we did over the course of the Springtime is we asked each of our caseworkers to look at all our cases - all 26,000 - to go through all the different cases to identify opportunities in which there might be appropriate interventions for different clients, either for an Educate intervention or a Career Seek intervention. We also knew though our internal review that there was an opportunity in which we could start to address some of the boundaries, some of the barriers that are in place around some of the supports. We also know that given that we know that more young people are on our caseload as a percentage of the larger caseload, we wanted to work more proactively and preventively through ESIA.

We've made two enhancements that were announced back in October. One is to extend support for the ETW program to dependants of ESIA clients so they can have some support for tuition and some books, as well as the student fees. We've also expanded our Career Seek program to include the first year of tuition, as well as some support for student fees, home Internet and data plans, child care and transportation, and some support for campus incidentals so that campus integration can be more seamless.

We also know that driving up numbers and getting people into programs doesn't necessarily mean success either. We'd like to see strong completion; we'd like to see people being able to get into their fields by getting jobs that they want to enter into. There are things that we can do internally that we've put into place, including caseworker support for students so that we're checking in, we're coming up with a plan to ensure that we're identifying any issues that might happen during the course of their studies. We're working more closely with NSCC to see ways in which we can improve outcomes. We're also looking at ways in which we can increase access to our post-secondary wage subsidies, so finding opportunities with employers so that our students during summer breaks can get a wage subsidy to participate to get work experience so they have a higher likelihood of labour market attachment afterwards. That includes job development which means our folks looking to engage with employers to make sure there are jobs available and opportunities for our graduates.

Really, when we talk about ESIA transformation this is directionally where we'd like to go. I've talked to stakeholders and our staff. My vision for transformation is to ensure that we're giving caseworkers and clients the opportunities in which we can find more options for people so they can build a plan and a vision, whether through education or through employment - how we can build stronger plans and remove some of those barriers.

Transformation is making sure our investments have the most effective and efficient and meaningful impact on clients' lives or making the right choices, making sure our caseworkers have the tools they need to support clients and looking at how we can work preventively with youth at risk to diminish reliance on ESIA permanently. So thank you very much, Madam Chairman, for the opportunity.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Grant. We're going to move on to questions. I would like to remind our presenters and our committee members to wait until you are recognized by the Chair before speaking, so that everything goes properly for Hansard when this is transcribed.

We'll start off with Mr. Orrell.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you for your presentation. I'm looking at the last slide you had there, making sure that caseworkers have the tools they need to support their clients. What type of training would your caseworkers receive to make sure they have those tools? I know we just underwent a huge transformation in the Department of Labour and



Advanced Education to combine all the career employment centres under one roof where they have people with disabilities - and they're all qualified. They're highly qualified for job development, labour market searches, helping people get student loans.

What kind of training do your caseworkers have there? Do they attach to these career centres as well to use the tools they have so that your caseworkers could concentrate on providing the services to their clients that they need financially, in order to help with that service?

MR. GRANT: What I would say is our folks are working strongly with our partners over at LAE to find opportunities in which we can look at shared services or shared opportunities in which we can leverage the opportunities that are available through LAE, leverage the partnerships we have in community.

We've got a variety of different folks through ESS with different skill sets, caseworkers who may help with certain items that we've outlined here. We also partner with not-for-profit agencies, employment agencies, to provide services where that expertise is in place in communities to take advantage of where there's a project or there's an opportunity through the labour market in the local area.

We think there are more opportunities we can look at through transformation for cross-training so that there's consistency across the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and what DCS has in terms of training specific to employment services.

What I would say is our folks have a variety of different backgrounds. We have folks who are job developers who work within community, work with employers to find opportunities. We have folks with strong coaching backgrounds. I think as we move towards transformation, one of our strong goals is to find opportunities in which we can have a more consistent training program for our staff that can take advantage of the things that are happening in LAE.

MR. ORRELL: It's huge that we provide the supports for people who are on income assistance to help them become independent and come back to being productive members of society. A lot of people aren't there because they want to be there, they are there because there's no other option. By attaching to the labour force and the labour market through LAE with Community Services, I think we can do a better job.

I think there is a lot of expertise out there that we're not tapping into. We get in our own silo and the problem is, I don't want to share with this because it's going to affect my job or our funding. I think we have to eliminate that so that we do what's best for the client.

I'm looking at your findings on the completion rates: 33 per cent completed the two-year program; 48 per cent of those exited ESIA in a 12-month period. Career Seek was 46 per cent and 58 per cent. If we're doing such a good job of people getting out of the system after they complete a program, are we doing enough to make sure the people who

went to those programs are able to complete those programs? Why would they not complete the program? Is it because of not enough funding? Is it because the course is too difficult maybe? You're saying in there that you will provide some supports for people for a college or university degree for one year. What do they do for the other three or four years that they have? How are people on income assistance able to - they need to have the tuition, the transportation, and all that goes with it, but if they're not providing that at the same time, what can we do to make sure that we get more than 33 per cent who graduate so that that percentage of people who exit in 12 months is higher?

MR. GRANT: I think the member raises a really important point, that we can do better and work more proactively around ensuring that our completion rates are higher. During the internal review, what was clear to us was that we need to ensure that there are more standards around the interactions between students and caseworkers, more proactive interactions to ensure that we're checking in and finding out how they're doing and what additional supports we can have.

There were some financial barriers in place that people have identified that have affected the completion rate. That's why, through these enhancements, we're trying to break down some of those financial barriers to ensure that that isn't a barrier. But to your point, there are still some of those barriers in place. I think as we move forward, what we would like to do is ensure that as a department we're clear with our staff on how we can support people, having strong evaluation in place to ensure that we're connecting with clients to find out what's working and what barriers are still in place, and working proactively with our post-secondary institutions as well to find out what partnerships we can put into place to ensure that our students are successful.

It's quite clear to us in the department that there's a lot of work that we can do. The exciting part is that between partners there are people out in the community who are willing to work with us to ensure that we're having better success rates and that we're trying to find ways in which we can better support our students. There's certainly more work to be done, but I think what we're seeing, at least from the standpoint of the numbers into the program, is a bit of an uptick in 2016-17.

But we can do more, and it's not just about getting people into the program. It's also about making sure that they're successful. There's more work to be done, but as a department, we're trying to find opportunities and ways in which we can have better completion rates than we have now.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: I would like to go back to the transformation project overall. I find it somewhat confusing, and I imagine some clients do too, because transformation is always spoken about both in present tense and in future tense; so, where are we? Is this a project in the future? Or is what people are experiencing now in fact the transformed ESIA approach?

MR. GRANT: What I would say is as we've talked to clients, and as we've talked to stakeholders, what has been very clear to us is that clients have articulated that they want to see some changes now and not wait for the entire package of transformation. Things like the post-secondary changes are components of some of the changes that we would like to see in a transformed world.

This isn't the end of it, certainly. We're looking at a variety of different streams that we talked about last time, including broader income security for low-income Nova Scotians, looking at developing a business case around the standard household rate concept so that we can have consistent and clear rules around eligibility, but also looking at adequacy for clients. We're looking at ways in which we can have more program interventions that better support outcomes for clients.

What I would say is that's where these post-secondary enhancements fall. We're seeing an opportunity to make changes now. We know that through our presentation over the years we've seen a decline so we wanted to make changes now to reflect the reality that we know we need to make changes to have better post-secondary outcomes, so we want to move on that now.

Where we're at with transformation is, we completed the stakeholder engagement. Our last session was in Yarmouth in early December. We're compiling the feedback around that to better inform the submissions we're developing around these different work streams. Over the next few months, it is going to be very critical around refining what those submissions will be for the ultimately transformed ESIA system.

This is a piece of it. It is indicative of where we would like to go. We want to see better outcomes for our clients. On the program intervention side, certainly this is where we'd like to take our approach - finding opportunities to reduce barriers, give more options to our caseworkers and clients so we can have better outcomes.

MS. ROBERTS: Thank you for your answer. Going to employment and the amount of wages that a client can retain before they are clawed back, \$150 - given the shelter rate - is probably just what someone needs to actually pay for an apartment in Halifax. The shelter rate at \$535 is not enough to actually acquire an apartment in our market.

How soon can we anticipate a significant transformation to that piece and either reducing the clawback or having it graduated and starting at 85 per cent, 70 per cent, 50 per cent, 30 per cent, as wages increase? Recognizing that \$150 - I don't know if that even brings a person to low-income cut-off, but also that in our economy right now labour market attachment is often pretty precarious employment. Your thoughts on that.

MR. GRANT: What I would say to your point is that right now what we see through the current system is there's a dramatic drop. The 70 per cent drop is certainly something we've had a lot of discussion on in our last round of stakeholder engagement. The

discussion just didn't centre around whether \$150 is too low. Certainly we heard that it could be higher and that we should be looking towards increasing that.

It was also a discussion around how can we have less of a dramatic drop and more of a gradual decrease over time. It's certainly something our team is looking at. I cannot provide when clients can expect that but it's certainly something that is on our radar and something that we're taking into consideration as we develop what a transformed ESIA world would look like.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Rankin.

MR. IAIN RANKIN: My interest was also on Page 9 with the 33 per cent that my colleague noticed as well as being an issue and certainly a number that the department can improve upon.

I appreciate the response where you're saying there could be an opportunity for more follow-up once they are admitted into a program, but I'm also wondering on the front end, how much careful consideration there is accepting people into the program and which program they're in, if there's counselling or if there's statistical background information about the labour market, if we're doing the best job we can to ensure that we're setting up the clients for potential success to graduate with that program, if their skill sets are meeting the requirements for the program, and what other obstacles were present in your findings?

MR. GRANT: I think these are important points. I think what's important as we mature the program and look to make positive changes we have to ensure that we're working closely with our clients so that an ETW or Career Seek intervention is appropriate for where the clients' needs are, where the clients are at.

What I would say is there's a number of opportunities in which we can look both internally and externally to what partnerships we can put in place with community groups, with post-secondary institutes, to find ways in which we can ensure at the front end - to the member's point - that people fully understand what it means to be engaged in post-secondary education. Whether it's a dedicated orientation program or something else, there are certainly opportunities there that we're exploring.

MR. RANKIN: Just one follow-up. I see an obstacle and a challenge for some of the recipients around the transportation piece - not only through this program, but we can talk specific to this program. I say that specific to rural HRM.

I've said it before and I'll say it again - I think that rural HRM often doesn't have opportunities that even some rural communities in Nova Scotia have, in terms of getting to the centre and where these schools are that people are going to. For example, someone from Prospect who doesn't have the ability to get on Metro Transit to make it down to Dalhousie or some of the other schools.

I'm just wondering about their allotment for the transportation, if that is the same as the allotment that someone on income assistance would get for appointments relative to the amount of times they have to go to class? I'm curious if that impacts going to school five days a week, 20 to 25 times a month - if it's \$150, I think that's inadequate. I'm just wondering if there's a different system in terms of how they get their transportation costs covered to ensure they actually get to school.

MR. GRANT: I think the member has pointed out that there is a gap between what is provided through ESIA from the standpoint of not just transportation, but all the different costs associated with attending post-secondary.

Going back to the slide, there still is the requirement for these students to apply for a student loan to address some of those gaps. Certainly we as staff have tried as much as possible to find solutions for our clients who live in rural areas. As I've shared in the last session, while there is a policy maximum within ESIA around transportation at \$150, we certainly have discretionary authority within the regulations to go above that.

There certainly are persistent gaps that remain in place around the supports that are available through ESIA for post-secondary, including transportation that clients would have to look at funding through their student financial aid.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Harrison.

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Thank you for your presentation. Two things - I guess they have to do with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and I'm just wondering if some kind of agreement can't be reached.

One is the amount of garbage that is on the highways. Before, that got cleaned up somehow, but now it doesn't seem to get cleaned up at all. I know around where my office is I have been waiting all summer and all Fall just to see if anything would be done and it wasn't. I made myself a commitment I'm going to be doing it in the Spring if it's not done before. Also, the fact that a lot of rural areas need just some brush-cutting done along the highway; there have been a lot of complaints over the year.

Is there a way in which those who are on income assistance can earn that little extra income and do those jobs? The money probably would have to come from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, however, it may be a good investment to involve some of these other folks if the TIR people cannot handle what they have now. I didn't know whether that was even a thought or a possibility in using these folks.

MR. GRANT: What I would say is our department, through ESS, looks at supporting our clients in a number of ways. One we would like to see - where it's appropriate - is where people are able and capable of finding a way in which they can work with their caseworkers and our staff, to come up with a plan, whether it's to job search and

find employment in the immediate term or if there are persistent barriers in place requiring further training and educational supports, to get them to where folks need to be.

We also have programming through the ESS program that works with employers to find jobs for folks so that we're not just providing training for people but we're actually actively looking to find job opportunities in which people on our caseload can find meaningful employment so that they can participate in that and earn money outside of ESIA. That's either through a targeted wage subsidy, or it's through incentives built into our regulations like our Harvest Connection program which allows for seasonal workers who work in the Annapolis Valley harvesting apples or whether they're harvesting Christmas trees, to earn up to the first \$3,000 without a clawback.

We're always looking at ways in which we can enhance the supports for our clients to find the plan that they need to ensure that they're finding work or they're getting the training that they need to move into the workplace where appropriate. There are always opportunities that can be explored. Through the work that we do on a day-to-day basis through ESS as well as through transformation, we're trying to find meaningful targeted interventions to support our client caseload.

MR. HARRISON: I just want to follow that up. I don't want to indicate that these are not meaningful jobs because I think there are people out there who would really like to see the environment better than what it is. There are certainly folks in the rural areas who are capable. They have the skills to do that brush cutting or whatever. I'm just thinking that if the department cannot find the time or does not have the manpower to do that right now, maybe these folks would be more than pleased to go out and do some of this work that they're capable of doing. There must be a way of getting the two together so that that work can get done and these people get a little bit extra income in order to live the way we would like them to live.

MR. GRANT: What I would say is that there are always lots of opportunities which we can explore, so we'll certainly take that under advisement. We'll certainly look at ways in which we can support our clients.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Mancini.

MS. MARIAN MANCINI: Thank you to both of you. You folks know the history on this probably better than I do, but before 2000, the family benefits program allowed people to attend school and they could continue to receive income assistance, then the regulations changed. But at the time that that regulation changed, there were 1,600 students receiving income assistance. If we look at the chart that you provided here today with both Educate to Work and Career Seek, we've got a total of 207 students who are in receipt of income assistance. I don't know the history, and I don't know what happened, why that even changed. I don't know if you folks were around at the time or not, probably not. But I know more specifically in relation to the Career Seek program, and you alluded to it, that

between 2013 and 2016 only seven students accessed that program. We got that information through a FOIPOP request.

That certainly raises questions about whether the eligibility has become too strict or if the caseworkers weren't promoting the programs. I think you referred to the fact that some investigation has taken place as a result, and there have been some changes - although I might add there's no new money that's going in, even with what's been added to programs. It's coming from somewhere. I'm just wondering what specific directives and training have been provided to the caseworkers with regard to the two programs, Career Seek and Educate to Work?

MS. JOY KNIGHT: Do you mean specific to the new enhancements where training has been provided?

MS. MANCINI: Well, yes, but in terms of promoting the programs, I guess, overall.

MS. KNIGHT: Through transformation, we have a lot of opportunity. We regularly speak with - Brandon leads communications with staff in the field. There are regular updates that happen. Through that opportunity, we've been continually reinforcing the importance of re-evaluating the caseload and clients if an education plan and post-secondary participation is appropriate for them. That message is constantly going out to the field.

As far as training goes, with the new enhancements, we've started a training plan for our caseworkers so that with the revision of all our standards and guidelines and new policies and all the work that has gone on behind the scenes to ensure effective implementation of these new enhancements, that training has also been developed and is being delivered to the staff.

MS. MANCINI: So are there specific criteria for the caseworkers to determine whether a client should go into a two-year program or a four-year program?

MR. GRANT: What we do is we work with the client to determine what would be the best fit for them. There are specific criteria around who can be eligible that I have alluded to, including being with ESIA for at least six months, having an education plan that supports post-secondary intervention. We work with the client to determine what would be the most appropriate option for them, either through community college or through university. Some clients don't want to take a four-year program. They would like to take a two-year program because they see a quicker attachment to the labour market.

There's a lot of back and forth between the caseworker and the client to determine what is the better fit for that client - where they would like to be and what that plan is. We develop the plan in consultation with the client to ensure that we're clear on what the long-term goal is and the best way to get there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I kind of want to go down the same line as Ms. Mancini. So when we look at the program now and three, four, seven people are taking advantage - and I'll say that loosely, taking advantage - of Career Seek, it's clearly not successful. I've had this conversation with the deputy minister and I've had that in Public Accounts Committee - it's clearly not a successful program.

There are a lot of barriers and I wonder if a holistic approach is taken here when it comes to bus passes, transportation, child care. If we have people who aren't being fed properly and not getting the proper diets, they're not going to be able to properly study. When we have people who don't have the proper child care, they're not going to be able to study. The Internet is now \$100 a month.

We had a successful program before 2000. I don't remember it but I know there have been a lot of successful cases and it seemed to me - actually, I do remember it. When I was on income assistance and I was part of the child welfare system, my caseworker would always say, education is free. Finish your Grade 12 because education is free.

A lot of people I knew who were wards of the court ended up getting a free education. A lot of people on income assistance ended up getting a free education. It seems to me that we had a successful system and now we've gone to where we have seven people, four people, or three people. Some of the stuff that I'm hearing from you and some of the stuff that I hear from people in Spryfield is we're not allowing - and I hate using the word "clients" but we're not allowing people who are on the system to make their own choices.

I just don't understand why we're telling adults where they fit in when if you're not on income assistance it's okay for me to go to university, it's okay for me to go to college, and I know I'm paying for it - it's okay for me to choose what I want and halfway through I can determine a different course and if I miss meetings, I'm not going to be dropped from the Career Seek, which happens. Life gets in the way and if you have four kids and you are living in public housing and you get \$150 a month and you live in Sambro and you've got no bus, you're going to miss appointments because it's \$50 to get into the city.

There are all these barriers and I hope - this is the first part of my question - I hope that you are standing back and you are not just looking at Career Seek and Educate to Work and saying the numbers are low, what's happening? I hope you are standing back and seeing that people in Greystone aren't getting the food they need, they have bedbugs, they have four kids or two kids or one kid and they have to get them to school. Are you taking a full approach on this, instead of narrowing in on that one part?

MR. GRANT: I think the quick answer is yes. What we're trying to do, and the vision around all transformation, is really identifying what we can do to provide more tools as support for our clients and also ensuring that we work towards some of these issues that have been raised by the member but also stakeholder groups and clients - issues that you've



raised around adequacy and around our rates as well as it relates to supporting food costs, shelter costs, and so on.

This is a piece of the transformation pie, as alluded to in another answer, that we're still looking at adequacy through the standard household rate, business case development, looking at income security, as well as how we can provide greater support to low-income Nova Scotians and then also looking at our program interventions as to how we can strengthen the options that are available to help people move forward in the plans that they work in consultation with their caseworker.

Good casework should involve two-way conversations around ensuring that some of these barriers are identified, being flexible to changes in circumstance. We know there's more work to be had on that but we feel, given the context of what we've heard, that people would like to see action now. We wanted to move forward on these changes to ensure that people could see changes now, that we can work more proactively so that we're working outside the system and supporting dependants of ESIA clients, to work more preventively, so looking at campus incidental support and Internet access for our Career Seek folks.

We're trying to look at all these different barriers and how we can start to address them and move now. This isn't the end, what we'd like to see is our continued evaluation of these programs so we can make it a successful program so we have better client outcomes. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MR. MAGUIRE: I can tell you the people I talk to and people in my community are tired of the word "transformation." They're tired of hearing we're still looking. I think they've been told that for a decade that changes are coming, things are coming, life is going to get better, and it doesn't seem to have.

There have been small things along the way that have helped but I think my personal experience and my experience as an MLA has been that the department is more focused on putting people back into the workforce, and the workforce could include a minimum wage job. I always use the example of the young lady who came into my office who wanted to be a nurse, but she went through the employment action plan and was told that she is quite capable of working so you need to go find a job. She went and found a job at Tim Hortons; two months later she was back in my office on income assistance. She was deflated, she was demoralized.

I think part of the transformation or part of these programs need to be to humanize people again and allow them to make their own choices and allow them to fail, if they fail - because if I go back to school, I can fail - and allow them to change their mind. I just think the door to get into these programs in the past has been about that wide, so it's very slim.

There will always be people who need income assistance and there's always going to be people who need our help but we have to make sure we treat them with respect and

dignity. I think the way things go with this program is it has become so difficult to get in and so difficult to stay on it that your numbers are seven, three, four, as reflective of it.

I just want to say and I know I'm sounding preachy here but when this transformation comes, I think the key to this should be just to kick the door wide open when it comes to education and say listen, if you want to get - if people think there's going to be a flood of people going on income assistance to get a free education, I mean if that is a thought, you're incorrect, it's not going to happen. I think if we want to better these people's lives we have to give them choice, we have to give them access, and this should have been done 10 years ago, not 10 months from now.

The question is, are you actually looking at allowing people the freedom to choose? Right now, it's a restrictive program where they're being told, listen, you have two feet and a heartbeat. You can go to work. We have to stop looking at making it so that people are employable, because employment means all kinds of things, and start looking at careers and breaking the cycle and allowing people to make their own choices. Are you looking at that?

MR. GRANT: Yes, we are looking at that.

MR. MAGUIRE: When is it coming?

MR. GRANT: What I would say is we made the enhancements now because we've heard the same comments from all sorts of different folks, that they would like to see positive changes now. We could have waited until the larger transformation package came forward, but people have been quite clear that they would like to see some changes . . .

MR. MAGUIRE: I'm sorry for interrupting, but on the slide it said that we support them for one year of study and one year of tuition. What happens after that? Are they on their own?

MR. GRANT: They would have to apply for student financial aid through student loans.

MR. MAGUIRE: Without income assistance?

MR. GRANT: No, they would still be eligible for income assistance if their eligibility remains with the program.

To be clear, I share the member's vision around creating choices for clients. One of the key goals of transformation is to ensure that there's stronger case management, and that includes finding opportunities and working with clients to identify how we can work towards a plan to help clients move ahead. I think what's clear for us is that, as Ms. Knight has said, the direction for me is an option, this is something that we should be actively engaging with our clients on, where appropriate, and working on with clients to ensure that

they're aware of this and that we're really working towards ensuring that not just the numbers are up, which I think is important, but also that we have a better success rate.

I am really concerned about ensuring that we're putting a lot of people in and they're failing and flunking out, because that's not good for our clients either. That creates frustration. That creates a lot of barriers as well. I want to make sure, as the executive director of this program, that we've got the supports in place to ensure that people are successful, that during the schooling they're getting the right on-the-job experience so that they can find work within their field, and that we are, as the member stated, breaking that cycle that we know is prevalent.

I know there's a lot of work to be done, but the work continues.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: Thank you for your presentation. I just want to talk a little bit about the announcement that came in the Fall, Educate to Work. I think it's a good program to help break the cycle. With any student, when you're finishing school, the barrier of how to pay for an education is huge and probably is a bigger barrier to people who have grown up with income assistance. I just want to find out a few more details about it. Besides the parent being on assistance, or caregiver or whoever, are there any more criteria for dependants to be able to take advantage of this program?

MR. GRANT: What I would say is that over the course of the last six months or so, what we've tried to do is work with our caseworkers to identify potential candidates who might be suitable, so looking and working with our caseload to ensure that we've identified where we might have dependants who may be able to take advantage of this enhancement. We've also been reaching out to community service providers that service youth about whether or not they have the capacity within their organizations and suitable candidates to participate in this enhancement.

Again, this is a first step around what I would say is a transformation approach, looking outside of the program because as it stands now, ESIA is highly regulated. It's a program which is closed mainly within the confines of that program. So we're looking at ways in which we can engage with community service providers in our caseload, to find opportunities in which we can support people who wouldn't necessarily be within the system.

This is a first step and we hope over the next few months that we'll be able to find a number of dependants who will be able to go school. I think as it stands now, we've got roughly about five who will be attending September classes. We're hoping to build on that in the future.

MS. TREEN: Can they identify themselves? Could they have left school for a year, have graduated for a year or two and still be classed in that category?

MR. GRANT: I believe, yes. What I would say is if folks have people in mind who might be able to benefit, what I would strongly suggest is that you would contact us. We have a 1-800 number that we can share with members. We're interested in how we can grow this program into something that, as we've said before, will work preventively to support people.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: The Nova Scotia Community College and Dalhousie both offer a free transition year program for African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq students. I'm wondering how caseworkers are identifying clients - if they are - who can benefit from those transition year programs as a way of getting into further programs.

MR. GRANT: What I would say is our caseworkers should be actively engaged in their community to understand what opportunities are available. I think this is ongoing work that is important. That's why we've worked towards developing a working group with NSCC to find ways in which we can have seamless communication on what opportunities are available for our students and what programs are available.

That work is underway and we do recognize there may be some gaps around the communication of those opportunities. What we're trying to do is ensure that that working group is active and that those opportunities and programs are communicated to our field staff efficiently where they are.

MS. ROBERTS: I was taking another look at the statistics that described the clients - the breakdown of the demographics of the ESIA caseload. Before I started looking at this more closely, I think, like many people, that I had an expectation of who would be there, and actually who is there is quite different. We know that anyone in receipt of CPP is probably not on your caseload because that would basically render them ineligible. Also 73 per cent of the clients are single with no children, of which 59 per cent are male. So there are 12,000 single men below the age of 65 who are ESIA recipients.

I guess I'm just wondering, does that demographic fit with the demographics of people who are accessing these programs for education? How do these programs address that large cohort of your caseload?

MR. GRANT: Certainly as we brought out in our presentation, it certainly brought up a lot of discussions with our stakeholders about the changing demographics of our caseload. Certainly when we were undergoing the analysis there were some surprises even within the ESIA staff about the dramatic shift that we're seeing more towards single individuals with no children.

What I would say is through the work that we're doing through the program intervention work, it's quite clear to us that we have to have more dedicated support for

this cohort. I think what's clear, too, through the analysis is that we're seeing individuals with significant multiple barriers that are attached to ESIA.

There's more work that needs to be done in identifying how the ESIA system can better support those individuals and what programming can be in place either within the department or supporting community organizations or other departments whether it's around mental health services, or we talked a lot about youth-specific services. So there's more work that needs to be done to address what we can see as a pretty dramatic shift in our caseload, more towards single individuals and single men.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Mancini.

MS. MANCINI: I think you said you had five attending in the Fall?

MR. GRANT: The ETWs, yes.

MS. MANCINI: Is that in the Career Seek program? Is that what you mean, or in both?

MR. GRANT: It's for our ETW dependents. There's the ETW dependants, which is the expansion. There's still the ETW program that has a couple of hundred folks in there so that's for the community college stream.

MS. MANCINI: I'm curious about the Career Seek program. Do you have any numbers that would show how many people applied to the program but were rejected?

MR. GRANT: I don't have those numbers on me now but I'd be happy to provide that to the committee once I'm able to compile that as well.

MS. MANCINI: Thank you, I'd appreciate that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: I'm going to go back to where Mr. Maguire was leading; I think where he was trying to go. I'm not going to speak for him but he's talking about the education part of Community Services. I think that we may have this division in the wrong department of government. If the Department of Community Services is going to be doing job coaching and job placing and trying to figure out how the labour market is - I think there are departments out there that do that already, and that's where people should be going.

As far as the education goes, I think that's the key to breaking the dependency, I think it's the key to breaking the cycle. I know my kids in university, when they were deciding where they wanted to go for university, I made sure they got somewhere where they would have a job when they were finished because my pot of money doesn't have a

bottomless pit in it and I'm sure the government's pot of money doesn't. For people to say yes, I want to get into this program and two years in, they want to change into another program, or get a degree here and they want to go get another degree, I don't think that's the solution to this.

I think we have to make sure that the people are coming in looking for, or they qualify for training in a field where there is going to be work. I think we want to make sure that when a person enters, to get a plan that they have a good idea of where their interests lie and where they would qualify to get an education so they would qualify to work afterwards.

I guess my question is, if we've got 26,000 people on income assistance and only 200 of them in school and a percentage of them failing, is this in the right department in your eyes?

MR. GRANT: What I would say is my job is to ensure that we have success in the program. I've been with the Government of Nova Scotia now for about 11 months. We've tried to ensure that we're seeing enhancements to the program to break down some of the financial barriers that are in place that we know, through the work that we've done, through the internal review that we undertook as the department.

We know there are financial barriers in place, and other barriers as well, that have led to the low numbers and the low completion rates. We're trying to address them now. We've taken steps over the last six months to address those issues.

My role is to ensure that we have programming in place to better support our clients. Where things should lie within departments, I think, is above my pay grade. What I would say is we've got a program in place that can help support clients. We know we can do a better job and we've got steps in place to ensure that we're doing a better job.

MR. ORRELL: I'm not saying that your caseworkers aren't doing a great job. I deal with them every day and my hat is off to them. I think they're in a very difficult position of trying to decide who qualifies to receive benefits. But to throw on top of them their decision of a person, which education they go for, if it's a two-year program, a three-year program - I know in the Department of Labour and Advanced Education that with their transformation they've got groups of people who are university-trained in this stuff. They've got people out there studying markets to see what's coming up and what's going to be necessary. They are trying to screen clients to make sure that they get the right education so that they do get a job when they come out and they are very successful at that.

I think if we work closer together with those groups of people and let your caseworkers be caseworkers, let them do what they do best because they do a great job at what they do. To throw the extra on them, to have 200 people, and as you said here it has gone up, but it went up six in the Career Seek and 40 in your Educate to Work - 200 people out of 26,000 who are getting an education, and only 33 per cent are finishing the education

and 50 per cent of that getting a job. They're not great numbers, so I think we should take a real hard look at who is doing the decision making, if their labour markets are being judged and checked, and make sure that those numbers rise up.

The only way we're going to break the cycle and make sure the people who need income assistance get it is if we're spending our money in the proper way. I think by putting them in a program where they are either not going to pass or setting them up for failure or the program is too hard or they don't have the right money for it, if we would share that around a little bit we'd be more successful. I just hope that in your transformation you're going to look at that.

MR. GRANT: Certainly we're looking at the roles and responsibilities and how we can better work with other departments but also with service providers in ways that support our clients and their outcomes.

I want to be clear, too, post-secondary intervention is a small piece of what ESS does as well. We support thousands of clients through our ESS program and some of the programming that I've identified in my slide show - whether it's support through other training outside of post-secondary supports, through job search support, resumé writing, and so on and so forth. We support up to 5,000 clients through the ESS program so it's not limited to the numbers that have articulated around post-secondary.

Certainly more work needs to be done and we can look at ways in which we can have better streamlined services and supports, whether it's working with other departments or community service agencies.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Thank you for your discussion today. I think it's very important and not an easy road to follow, how to be successful at this.

I'd like you to go back to maybe the page before this question here, Page 11, and just talk about internal improvements. Can you specifically talk about each one of those on the top of the chart there, how things have changed within the department, to show that you have increased caseworkers? Are the caseworkers dedicated to students only, or do they have their own caseload plus the students? And maybe all those four bullets. I know you've talked about a lot of them but you might have a look.

MR. GRANT: I'll start and perhaps Ms. Knight can supplement my response. To be clear here, in April we worked with our ESS staff - ESIA is broken into two divisions. We have the Income Assistance Division, which has the majority of our clients, as well as a dedicated ESS team. So ESS caseworkers are dedicated to all the different supports and services we talked about in the presentation, whether it's supporting client attachment to the labour market in the immediate term or whether or not some of these supports and services are important for medium- to long-term attachment to the labour market.

We worked with our ESS caseworkers to say that we do realize that we've seen a steady decline, specifically on the post-secondary supports and what we can do to better ensure that we're promoting, we're working with our clients, where appropriate, that a post-secondary intervention is something that we would explore with them.

There have been a number of policy changes that we've talked about and standards that we've worked on to ensure there's better connection that our caseworkers are looking for opportunities in which to promote this. We've developed a working group with NSCC to look at ways in which we can work more closely together on some of the things we talked about in terms of identifying further opportunities to have those secondary supports in place for our students and specifically for our ESIA clients.

Another really important part of the work that we do through ESS is working in job development and working with employers to find job opportunities specifically for our clients and supporting those employers by providing wage subsidies through our program so that people, employers, can hire our clients so they get the job experience and hopefully get into the field that they are studying for or, whether it's more of an immediate intervention.

These things are in place. We're trying to ensure that we're enhancing these supports because there are opportunities available. There are strong employers here in Nova Scotia who would like to work with us so we're trying to ensure that as an ESS division, we're finding every opportunity we can to start moving forward and having better completion rates and better participation in these programs.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Knight, do you have anything to add?

MS. KNIGHT: I'd just add a few specific concrete examples, if the members would like. Specific to the caseworker supports, we've mandated a minimum of five meetings per semester. In looking at the timelines of that, before a program would begin, to see that we're meeting with them to ensure that the proper supports are in place before they begin a semester. That would involve tutoring, different supplies they may need, looking at their transportation and child care needs, and making sure all those issues are addressed so they don't become barriers in the first few weeks of the program, which we know are the most critical. Then we would have a checkpoint a few weeks into the program to ensure that their needs are still being met and that things are going well in the first few weeks.

As Brandon mentioned, with the working group we have at NSCC, we're streamlining our processes and our abilities to work with the college to have an early intervention and address those issues in those first six weeks so that our students are seeing higher success. As well, with that new working group, ensuring that the new student advisor program that NSCC has been rolling out recently actually proactively works with our clients so they have an on-campus support as well as our caseworker support. We're hoping to see a lot of success with that as well.



One of the administrative burdens that was changed for clients with the caseworker supports was that they no longer need to show receipts when it comes to child care transportation, so we trust them. They are adults and we want to give them the independence so that if they discuss that they have a need we're willing to supplement that, up to the maximums that we've set in policy. That has been a good, positive change for them as well.

Lastly, just on the post-secondary wage subsidy program, we have seen far greater success with our clients who are able to participate in work experience in the field of study. We look at helping them attach before they participate in post-secondary so that they're sure it's the program they have real interest in and aptitude for and then of course during the summer months as well so they get that experience. We've found the greatest success with that so we're really hoping to be able to roll out more of that support. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne, a follow-up?

MR. HORNE: Just on the students who are getting into a work career or into university, are there extra monies that you would allot for like tutoring of the students when they run up against something that they have difficulty with?

MR. GRANT: Yes, there is support for tutoring within the program. Again, through strong case management, like Ms. Knight has articulated, if tutoring is something our clients need, there is some support available for our clients.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. MAGUIRE: Just a couple of quick questions. What's the criteria to be eligible for Career Seek and Educate to Work?

MR. GRANT: For Career Seek and ETW, there are a couple of crossover eligibilities. You have to be a client with us for at least six months. You have to undergo an employment assessment as well as an educational plan to find out whether or not this is the right approach. Some of the programs require you to apply for student financial aid as well first, so you can be eligible for that support.

Really we would look at a number of different factors through those assessment processes to determine whether or not that's the right fit for the client.

MR. MAGUIRE: What is the department doing to inform people on income assistance of the program and the availability of school? Are you actively reaching out? Have you sent out letters or is that part of the process going forward, just to bring an awareness of - I mean even working with MLAs and different government officials. I think there is some confusion, especially now that we've brought in the supports to help people going through it - I don't think people are fully aware of that. I'm just wondering what we're going to do, what you're going to do to inform people of all these new programs.

MR. GRANT: For the enhancements certainly there was a formal announcement and we've been working with our caseworkers, again very systematically, to identify clients and having those conversations but certainly to raise awareness we'd certainly be interested in hearing from MLAs about how we can promote these changes to the programs so their constituents are aware. Certainly more work can always be done to raise awareness around this.

Over the course of the Fall as well, we've been engaged with our stakeholders. We met with over 130 of our stakeholders from across the province to get the word out about the enhancements as well. We're trying to be as proactive as possible to make sure people are aware of these changes.

MR. MAGUIRE: Maybe a possible mailout - not from the MLAs, but from the department.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: I'm going back to my question before because I'm not sure if you understood what I was asking or not. With the Educate to Work dependants, I know you were talking about finding candidates or whatever that are good for the program - are they actually aware that this is a program? Are they being made aware that this is available for them?

MR. GRANT: Yes, I would certainly hope so. What we're trying to do through this program, as I've articulated before, is that we're trying to make sure that we're communicating strongly with our staff as the linkage into our client base to identify dependents that might be appropriate, as well as working with community service providers that support youth, to see where opportunities are to partner. We've already partnered with a few youth services in identifying clients that they support to access this program.

Those are our two strategies to reach out. We're always interested in ways in which we can get the word out more but our approach has been to work with our ESS staff, as well as community service providers that work with youth.

MS. TREEN: I'm kind of with Brendan on this, only on my own program. I think that these students that could take advantage of this should be made aware, maybe through a letter going out. You are aware of what families have what age group. Maybe when they are in Grade 10, Grade 11, Grade 12, they are made aware that this is out there, they can feel the hope - oh my goodness, this program is going to be there and this is my way out. I think some kind of communication - I mean your caseworkers are great but they have huge loads in trying to remember everything they need to do and say and sometimes it's not remembered in a conversation.

If there's something sent out to that household, a pamphlet or something that can sit around that someone can see and say look at this, I'm going to stick this on the fridge

because this is where I'm going, and approach them when they're at a Grade 10 level or whatever so it sets them up that they feel they can be successful. I think they need to be made aware of it and going through caseworkers, it's good if someone can identify it but it's only as good as the caseworker who they have that identifies it.

I feel that if you did something up that could go to them early on - not in the last year but early on, in Grade 10 or Grade 11 - to make them aware that this program is available and they could take advantage of it.

MR. GRANT: I'm very pleased to see that Ms. Knight has written me a note saying that we are, in fact, doing so. Perhaps she could provide some details on that.

MS. KNIGHT: Actually it's a great idea because we are looking at doing a mailout near the end of the month targeting those in families with dependants across the province who may be eligible for the program come September. We are also targeting with a double message, so we have another program that supports youth with employment services.

What we like to do is provide sort of a continuum of support so they can enter a program called the Youth Development Initiative. That's for youth ages 12 to 21 attached to ESIA, to their families, looking at how we can support them with career exploration and understanding career goals and what are the high school credits they require in order to move into post-secondary, so giving them that information so they are then aware there is the ETW program that they can move into. How do we look at it more holistically and wholly, and provide longer-term supports to them. That mailout with both programs will be going out shortly.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: You brought us some metrics for sort of judging the success of Career Seek and Educate to Work and I'm wondering if you have similar metrics for the other ESS programs you've been making reference to, in terms of wage subsidies and other programs that are targeting the same group, that you can share?

MS. KNIGHT: Metrics as in how we're measuring outcomes?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MS. KNIGHT: We do, absolutely, and moving forward we're really looking to improve that. We have been a bit limited by the technology and the data collection that we've had to date in the department so through the transformation, that's a key part of the work we're doing, to develop the tools and put them in place so that we are collecting information we need to make the right decisions and to measure our outcomes and be able to report on them.

We do have our departmental outcomes, they are defined in our outcomes framework so we'll be looking to communicate how we're reaching those outcomes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts, a follow-up.

MS. ROBERTS: This is not exactly a follow-up. I'm wondering to what extent the pace and the scope of transformation is at all constrained by the budget? Obviously every government program is constrained by the budget but could we be getting somewhere faster if we were able to invest some more money, for example, towards a basic income kind of framework? What consideration has there been of that?

MR. GRANT: What I would say is what we've shared during stakeholder engagement, and I think it was shared at our last meeting. Under the income security stream of the ESIA transformation, we are looking at concepts around basic income and what the implications would be for here in Nova Scotia. That's certainly something we're looking at through that stream of work.

What I would say is the work that we're doing through transformation is focused in on taking the feedback that we've received from the First Voice sessions and from stakeholders in line with the outcomes that we have in place, and finding ways in which we can develop a better system that strives more towards better outcomes for our clients.

What I would say is that even outside of a basic income concept, what I think is important is, these types of interventions - whether it's employment or post-secondary - are important considerations moving forward. Also, how we can proactively work with our clients to ensure they have the opportunities - the training and access to resources - to support people, support themselves and their family in moving towards long-term goals they might have.

The work is proceeding and progressing. What I would say is we've had tremendous feedback from clients and stakeholders on the directional importance of some of the key items. What we're hearing is that we need to certainly look at the adequacy, we certainly need to look at the administration of the system but we also have to look at the tools and supports we have in place so we can proactively help folks achieve what they want to achieve.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll finish our questioning with Ms. Mancini.

MS. MANCINI: Do you have a specific budget for the enhancements to the two programs?

MR. GRANT: The enhancements come out of our allotment under our labour market funding. So through our labour market funding, as well as our ESS budget that we have at headquarters, we're able to pay for the enhancements as they were articulated.

MS. MANCINI: Do you know the dollar amounts that you can put out for this? Or is it just sort of a big net there?

MR. GRANT: What I would say is that there's room for growth. We're not at the position now, in terms of saying that we have a cap. We have an allotment that we have within our ESS budget but there's certainly room in which we can have more people come on to ESS and Career Seek and access these programs. The number that we have now, in terms of our allotment - certainly we can accommodate additional students onto the program.

MS. MANCINI: Could that be provided to the committee, the actual budget amount?

MR. GRANT: Yes, we can provide our labour market funding that we received, as well as our ESS funding that pays for these programs.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's great, thank you. We'll give you a few minutes if you have any closing remarks.

MR. GRANT: The only thing I would add is thank you for the conversation today. It certainly helps us. This is something that our team is certainly passionate about. We know that it's important work and we really appreciate the questions and feedback we've received today in moving forward. Thank you for the opportunity to come here today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, we really appreciate you being here.

That concludes our presentation portion. We do have some committee business to take care of, but let's take a quick recess until 2:33 p.m. and then we will reconvene.

[2:31 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:34 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have a few items of committee business to take care of. I believe in all of your packages you have hard copies of correspondence that we have received as a committee. I know this was all emailed out to us electronically as well, prior to today's meeting.

We have correspondence from the Department of Community Services regarding the Disability Support Program and we have various article excerpts from *The Nova Scotia Advocate* around special needs submitted by Kendall Worth for our committee's information. I would like to have permission to have those posted onto the website. Okay, that's great.

Another issue that we have chatted about a number of times and we're going to move forward on today is our committee meeting time. For our March 7<sup>th</sup> meeting, we will keep the time 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. but starting in April we will move our time forward and it will be from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

That being said, our next meeting date is going to be March 7<sup>th</sup>. It will be on the sexual violence strategy progress report. The time for that meeting alone - that will be the end - is from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. that day.

Is there anything anyone else would like to mention? We do need to have our signatures on our committee report so for our members who are permanent members of this committee who didn't sign it last time, if we could have you sign it. So permanent members, please sign before you leave.

With that, I will adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 2:35 p.m.]